Ensure that materials are plain, simple and understood.

The best way to do this is to follow as many of these principles as possible.

**Health Literacy Principles Checklist**

- **PLANNING**
  - **Objective**
    - Define the communication objectives.
  - **Target audience**
    - Know audience needs, interests, and behaviors.
    - Identify ways to engage the target audience.
    - Involve the target audience in development and testing.

- **CONTENT**
  - **Purpose**
    - Focus and limit the objectives.
    - State your objectives in the title, cover illustration, and introduction.
  - **Evidence**
    - Ensure content is accurate and evidence-based.
    - State what is known and when relevant, what is not known.
  - **Scope**
    - Limit to essential information. Include the “need to know”, but not the “nice to know”.
    - Include only information that is relevant and meaningful to the intended audience.
    - Focus on behaviors, skills and instructions.
    - Go beyond the facts to include action-oriented material.
    - Stress, repeat and summarize the main points.
  - **Language and culture**
    - Ensure you have high quality translation and interpretation of content.
  - **Demographics**
    - Ensure content reflects age, education, income, gender, occupation, and residence of intended audience.
  - **Clarity**
    - State the information as clearly and simply as possible.
  - **Tone and appeal**
    - Include positive, truthful and helpful content.
    - Edit content for bias and prejudice.
  - **References**
    - Note key sources.
    - Provide sources for more information.
  - **Date/authorship**
    - Include author(s) and date of publication or revision.

- **LITERACY DEMANDS**
  - **Reading level**
    - Ensure as many people as possible can read and understand the materials.
    - Consider using a readability calculator, but be sure you understand its limitations.
  - **Choice of words**
    - Use common, every-day, specific words that are two syllables or less.
    - Avoid using jargon, abstract words, technical terms, statistics, abbreviations and acronyms.
    - Include the pronunciation of words that may not be familiar.
    - Explain words, expressions, and phrases through simple definitions. Consider using word/picture association or examples.
    - Use positive statements. Limit sentences that begin with “don’t” or “never”.
“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.”

Albert Einstein


**Sentences/paragraphs**
- Write in a conversational style, using active voice.
- Use short, simple and direct sentences (8-15 words).
- Use short paragraphs and avoid large blocks of text.

**Use of numbers**
- Do the math for the reader, do not require addition, subtraction, multiplication or division.
- Consider using visual presentations of numbers.
- Use whole numbers when possible (1 in 1,000 instead of 0.001).
- Express risk information in frequencies (1 out of 10 instead of 10%).

**ORGANIZATION**

- **Context**
  - Present context before new information.

- **Sequence**
  - Present information that is logical and easy to follow.
  - Position important information at the beginning and end for emphasis.

- **Groupings**
  - Divide information into small, logical sections.

- **Headings**
  - Use short, simple and explanatory headings to organize.

**LAYOUT AND TYPOGRAPHY**

- **Font**
  - Use a clear typeface like Times New Roman or Arial.
  - Use upper and lowercase letters; avoid using all uppercase.
  - Limit the variations of typefaces used.
  - Use a type size that is easy to read and as large as possible (at least 12 point; 14 or 16 point text is preferred).

- **Headlines and titles**
  - Use headlines and titles to orient and engage the reader.

- **White space**
  - Provide breaks for the eye with white space.
  - Balance the use of white space with content and graphics.
  - Separate paragraphs and topics by one or two lines.

- **Justification**
  - Avoid full justification of text; format edges flush left with right ragged instead.

- **Highlights/cues and color**
  - Use bulleted lists, underlining, and bold for emphasis.
  - Introduce color to highlight, add clarity, differentiate or focus the eye.
  - Use shading, boxes, and arrows to direct attention to key content.

**GRAPHICS**

- **Engagement**
  - Use graphics to grab attention.
  - Spotlight the objectives with the cover graphic.
  - Reinforce the objectives with graphics.
  - Choose graphics that are friendly, attractive and recognizable.

- **Relevancy**
  - Use action oriented graphics.
  - Show key desired behaviors, rather than behaviors to avoid.
  - Choose graphics that reflect the age, gender, ethnic and cultural background of the audience.
  - Design graphics that support and reinforce important points.

- **Clarity**
  - Use simple design, free from clutter and distractions.
  - Avoid diagrams, graphs, charts and data tables that require multiple steps for use.